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ABSTRACT

A review of literature and work with focus groups shows that, although adult education has always focused on helping undereducated adults prepare for work, since the early 1990s there has been emphasis on work force development (helping prepare the work force and get them into rewarding productive jobs) and workplace (organizational) change. A more systematic approach to training and education for employed and unemployed workers has been called for, especially in the new Workforce Investment Act (1998). Adult education can be a dynamic player in these new systems for improving the workforce and strengthening workplaces if adult educators follow the following guidelines: (1) be clear about who they are serving and what those customers' needs are; (2) involve stakeholders; (3) provide clear and relative learning objectives; (4) document program evaluation; (5) provide multiple learning opportunities; (6) establish a corps of well-prepared and well-supported professionals; (7) make efficient linkages between adult education and other services and opportunities; (8) provide appropriate learning facilities and technologies; (9) keep resources adequate and consistent; (10) establish mechanisms to protect the rights of workers; and (11) create state-level supports. Adult educators should prepare themselves for leadership roles and develop collaborative systems with other educators and the business and industrial sector. (16 references)

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Integrating Adult Basic Education with Workforce Development and Workplace Change: How National-Level Policy Makers Can Help

A Monograph for the U.S. Department of Education

Submitted October 1998

by

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Executive Summary

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Adult basic education has always focused on helping undereducated adults prepare for work, particularly since the mid-1980s when a number of work-related basic skills initiatives were undertaken by the federal and state governments, business, labor, and the media. By the mid-1990s, there was an emphasis on welfare reform and preparing schoolchildren for work, but a decline in support for adult basic education. This decline in support was despite adult education's track record of benefitting employed and unemployed adults and their communities, unions, and employers.

During the 1990s there has also been a growth of voices -- from policy analysts within government, business, and labor -- for new approaches to *workforce* development (i.e., helping prepare the workforce and get them into rewarding, productive jobs) and *workplace* (organizational) change (i.e., helping companies provide high-quality services and goods through a multi-pronged continuous improvement process and an emphasis on workplace learning). These analysts argue that conventional approaches to pre-employment training and training of employed workers have too often been poorly planned, under-financed, not focused on the skills and knowledge workers now need, and not connected to other services. They call for a more-systematic approach to training and education for employed and unemployed workers, both at the community and workplace level. This logic underlies the newly-passed Workforce Investment Act.

Adult education can be a dynamic player in these new systems for improving the workforce and strengthening workplaces if adult educators follow these guidelines:

1. Work-related adult basic educators need to be clear about who they are trying to serve and what those "customers'" needs are.

2. Stakeholders should be actively involved via an ongoing, collaborative decision-making process.

3. Learning objectives need to be clear, realistic, relevant, based on a careful needs assessment, and tied to agreed-on standards.

4. Mechanisms for individual assessment and program evaluation need to efficiently document results and enable stakeholders to make decisions about "next steps."

5. *Multiple learning opportunities need to be provided which allow learners to devote the time they need to achieve their learning objectives.*

6. *A corps of well-prepared and well-supported professionals is needed.*

7. *Efficient administrative and curricular linkages must be made between adult education and other services and opportunities within the system.*

8. *Appropriate learning facilities and technologies need to be in place to enable busy adults to learn at convenient times and locations.*

9. *Sustained, consistent, and adequate investment of resources is needed, along with incentive structures which encourage such investment.*

10. *Mechanisms need to be put in place to protect the rights of workers.*

11. *State-level supports are needed for local-level efforts.*

For adult educators to be able to work with other stakeholder groups to create effective work-related learning systems at the community and workplace levels, they will need support from the state and, ultimately, the national level. Listed below are steps which national-level decision-makers -- in government, business, labor, and adult education and training -- can take to provide guidance, information, and other supports to those working at the community and workplace levels:

Step 1: Prepare yourself for a leadership role by (a) educating yourself about the potential and requirements of well-planned work-related adult education and (b) developing your own vision of an integrated workforce development and learning system.

Step 2: Create forums where workforce education and training policy is discussed.

Step 3: Figure out what supports national-level policy makers should provide to adult educators. (Consider in particular what adult educators need in terms of a rethinking of goals and standards, professional development opportunities, connections to other players in the system, and access to technology.)

Step 4: Provide incentives, flexibility, and supports to business, labor, and other players, to encourage their involvement and investment in workforce development. Consider how . . .

- *. . . Government can facilitate private-sector investment.*
- *. . . Government can target public funds to special needs in the field.*
- *. . . Flexible guidelines can facilitate innovation and rapid response to emerging needs.*
- *. . . Workforce services should follow high-performance principles.*
- *. . . Skill standards can keep efforts focused on priority learning objectives.*
- *. . . Collaborative decision-making can build ownership and commitment.*

In conclusion: Americans have a history of being "system builders." National-level decision-makers need to recognize that leadership is needed now if we are to create a new workforce system which ensures that U.S. workers are able to participate actively in good jobs in a strong, healthy economy.

Introduction

Federal policy makers are shifting decision-making authority for workforce development to the states and emphasizing education as a tool for workforce and economic development. At the same time, support for adult education -- and particularly workplace basic education -- has in some cases dried up or been put on hold, as state- and national-level policy makers focus more on school reform and getting welfare recipients into jobs. In this context, advocates for adult basic education ask "Where do we fit, and how can we get the supports we need?"

This paper is especially written for national-level decision makers -- both in the federal government, the business community, and organized labor -- who want to better understand the potential benefits of work-related adult education and how adult basic education can be better integrated with workforce development and workplace change. It concludes with steps which policy makers can take to target resources to the creation of community-level work-related learning services for employed and unemployed adults.

This monograph draws on literature and interviews from sources outlined in the Appendices, under funding from the U.S. Department of Education. It also builds on related research funded by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy and the National Institute for Literacy. The findings and recommendations presented here are those of the author and don't necessarily reflect those of the funders.

The author presents this paper with the hope that national-level policy makers will now take leadership on the important issue of the basic skills of both employed and unemployed adults. This issue has been set aside in recent years by national-level policy makers, despite previous valuable initiatives by government, business, and labor. Worker basic skills is also being ignored despite current interest in related issues like workforce development, economic development, school-to-work transition, welfare reform, workplace technologies, productivity, and competitiveness.

Given the importance of having an adult workforce ready to participate in the new economy and its workplaces, it's time to revisit the question of "where does adult basic education 'fit' in efforts to prepare U.S. workers for rewarding and productive roles in a strong and healthy economy?"

Part I

Adult Basic Education and Workforce Preparation: A Recent History

The mid-1980s to early 1990s: Work-related basic skills becomes a priority.

Providers of adult basic education in the United States have always tried to respond to the work-related goals of those they served. However, linking adult education to workforce preparation got its biggest boost beginning in the mid-1980s when several interrelated adult literacy initiatives got underway:

- The electronic and print media made literacy the focus of a series of public awareness campaigns which heavily emphasized the economic implications of an allegedly undereducated U.S. workforce.

- State governments drew on the energy generated by the media coverage and set up their own adult literacy initiatives, in many cases channelling resources into establishing workplace basic skills programs to improve worker productivity and companies' economic competitiveness.

- Adult education researchers and publishers generated handbooks, studies, and conferences to help providers understand how to best use adult education for work-related purposes.

- Employers and trade associations began setting up their own employee basic skills programs geared to the special needs of their industries.

- Labor unions issued guidebooks, secured funding, and established basic education programs for their members, with special emphasis on union-related issues.

- The federal government undertook several workplace literacy projects, through the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, the Small Business Administration, and the Department of Commerce. The largest of these was the Department of Education's National Workplace Literacy Program, which from 1989 through 1997 provided $130 million to workplace literacy demonstration projects based in companies and unions across the nation. These projects produced curriculum, assessment, and evaluation tools and a cadre of experienced workplace educators. They also sparked the creation of state-level workplace education initiatives around the country.

The above initiatives tended to emphasize teaching job-related basic skills in the workplaces where workers were employed. In reality, however, adult educators were also using job-related curricula in community learning centers and other "non-workplace" contexts. They recognized that many adults who come through the doors of adult education centers hope that "going back to school" will help them get a better job or do their current job better. Educators

thus focused on helping learners assess their own job-related interests and abilities, find jobs, understand employer-provided benefits, master job-related documents, or improve their English so they would feel more comfortable in whatever workplaces they were employed in.

Work-related adult basic education was thus more complex than providing "workplace literacy programs" of the type fostered by the federal government and other sources (i.e., adult basic education provided to employed workers in their places of employment, with a special focus on mastering the job-related tasks which those employees face in their job). "Work-related basic education" could also be provided outside any particular workplace (e.g., in a community adult learning center), to either employed or unemployed workers, and focus on either broader work-related tasks (e.g., finding a job, handling insurance claims) or narrower job requirements (e.g., reading work orders, doing precision measurements).

The early-1990s to later-1990s: Employee basic skills is still an issue, but support is put on hold.

By the early 1990s, preparing employed or unemployed adults for the world of work was commonly seen as a key purpose for adult basic education -- whether carried out in workplace settings or elsewhere. Publishers and software manufacturers introduced new lines of work-related basic skills products. Assessment specialists developed new tools to measure the work-related skills of adults. The National Adult Literacy Survey and related research focused much of its attention on determining the work-readiness skills of U.S. adults. Work-related literacy was high on the agendas of national and state adult education conferences and was being discussed on listservs and other new electronic communication channels.

In the mid-1990s, companies were adapting the banner of "the learning organization" and emphasizing ongoing learning by workers, to enable them to handle multiple tasks, manage new technologies, solve problems, and work in teams. This was seen as a rejection of more-traditional management styles in which workers presumably "checked their brains at the door," kept their mouths shut, engaged in repetitive tasks, and waited for higher-level managers to tell them what to do. New research was underway -- by the National Institute for Literacy (through its Equipped for the Future initiative), the National Skill Standards Board, and other sources -- to more-clearly define the skills and knowledge required by this new world of work.

As the decade neared its end, adult education was increasingly pushed toward serving employment-related purposes, as authority for workforce and economic development policy was shifted toward the states. Most states assumed that a primary purpose for adult education should be to develop the workforce and economy, and many adult educators felt pressure to justify their existence by emphasizing their relevance to work-related purposes.

Unfortunately for those who believed in adult basic education -- for work-related or other purposes -- many of the new state workforce initiatives overlooked adult basic skills education. They instead emphasized making schools more work-related ("school-to-work") and placing welfare recipients in jobs with little or no pre- or post-employment education or training ("labor force attachment") (Jurmo, 1996). This was despite a growing body of evidence that a significant slice of the welfare-recipient population needed education to qualify for and succeed in decent jobs (D'Amico, 1997).

Further complicating the status of adult education were critiques which claimed that adult basic education had not proven itself to be an effective tool for workforce preparation (Grubb, 1996). These critics argued that adult education programs used outmoded teaching methods not connected to the realities of workplaces or other contexts, were not of sufficient intensity or duration, too often merely served as "homes" for learners rather than places where real learning went on, and were otherwise not very effective. Adult educators countered that not all adult education programs were the same and that many adult education programs were in fact innovative, responsive to learner needs, and used relevant, contextualized curricula. Advocates for adult education argued that a broad-brush dismissal of adult education was both unfair and poor policy, given the basic skills needs of many adults and the demonstrated potential of good adult basic education.

Such a context presented many new opportunities and challenges to adult educators. On one hand, many adult educators were excited by what appeared to be a new interest in work-based learning. They had developed expertise in this area and were ready to provide job-related basic skills services in the workplace or in other settings. But these educators were also often frustrated when policy and funding didn't support the use of adult basic education for either employed or unemployed workers. Also frustrating was the fact that adult educators in many states weren't being given a say in shaping workforce development policy.

The Workforce Investment Act, July 1998

The enactment of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in July 1998 may prove to be a turning point in the history of workforce preparation. Under Title II, when adult education programs begin implementation of the new legislation in July 1999, programs must give priority to establishing work-related outcomes, including ". . . placement in, retention in, or completion of, postsecondary education, training, unsubsidized employment or career advancement."

The legislation identifies "workplace literacy services" as included in adult education and literacy services provided by local programs. And, in awarding grants, states "shall consider . . . whether the activities provide learning in real life contexts to ensure that an individual has the skills needed to compete in the workplace" and ". . . whether the activities coordinate with other available resources in the community, such as by establishing strong links with . . . one stop centers . . . job training programs, and social service agencies."

The legislation also provides funding for National Leadership activities including "developing and replicating model and innovative programs, such as the development of models for basic skill certificates, and workplace literacy programs." National funding can also include evaluations to determine how adult education activities increase skills that lead participants to involvement in further education and training, and enhance their employment and earnings.

The WIA encourages states to provide leadership to adult education programs by funding the "integration of literacy instruction and occupational skill training, and promoting linkages with employers." The state plans must also include a description of how adult education and literacy activities using these Federal funds will be integrated with other adult education, career development, and employment and training activities in the State.

Title 1 of the Act requires that "There shall be established in each local area of a State, and certified by the Governor of the State, a local workforce investment board, to set policy for the portion of the statewide workforce investment system within the local area." Membership must include "representatives of business in the local area, representatives of local . . . entities providing adult education and literacy activities, and postsecondary educational institutions, representatives of labor organizations or other representatives of employees, representatives of community-based organizations, representatives of economic development agencies and representatives of each of the one-stop partners."

The Workforce Investment Act thus creates a climate and guidelines for states to be more systematic and collaborative in how they approach workforce development. It will be up to adult educators to figure out (a) what roles they can play in these new state and local systems and (b) how they can get the resources they need to respond to the work-related learning needs of the adults they want to serve.

Part II

Benefits of Work-Related Adult Basic Education

As stated in Part I, the new Workforce Investment Act requires adult education and other workforce preparation programs to be more clear about the work-related outcomes they intend to produce. That is, programs need to articulate how their programs will impact learners' career advancement, competitiveness, productivity, and so forth.

Those identifying work-related outcomes for adult education programs should draw on the evidence already generated by federal and other workplace basic skills efforts. Evaluations point to a wide range of potential benefits of well-designed work-related adult basic education programs in workplace and non-workplace settings. These benefits accrue to many different stakeholders and take many different forms often not anticipated when these efforts were first undertaken in the mid-1980s. Although more comprehensive research is needed in this area, evaluations and anaecdotal feedback from federal workplace basic skills efforts and other sources have identified the following potential benefits:

Benefits cited for work-related basic education in the workplace

Benefits for individual workers (and their families and communities)

Workers can improve their . . . .

- productivity and therefore job security in current jobs and income levels;
- safety and health;
- job satisfaction and morale;
- understanding of their rights and responsibilities as employees and/or union members. (This includes being able to use company benefits more effectively.);
- promotability into new jobs inside or outside their current workplace;
- ability and credentials to qualify for further education, training, and apprenticehips for personal and/or professional development;
- performance of basic skills tasks outside the workplace (e.g., as family members, as consumers, as citizens);
- view of themselves as successful learners and of education as something positive.

Benefits for companies

Companies -- including the employers who own them, other employees, and investors -- can benefit when employees participate in workplace education programs and achieve the above-described benefits. Work organizations can improve . . .

- Productivity and safety: Workers are better able to handle particular job-related basic skills tasks (e.g., performing math functions required by statistical process control, solving problems in teams, using ergonomically-correct procedures), with improved productivity (reduced errors, reduced delays in performing tasks to ask for help) or improved safety (for the worker, co-workers, and customers) the result.

- Efficiency of company benefits: Companies invest in various kinds of employee benefits like insurance, vacation and sick time policies, and pension and investment plans and want their employees to be able to use them efficiently. Some workplace education programs have helped workers to make better use of those kinds of benefits.

- Human resource development planning: By involving managers, supervisors, and workers in the planning of workplace education efforts, those stakeholder become more familiar with worker skills needs, good educational practice, how to integrate employee basic skills into other organizational development initiatives, and the value and mechanics of cross-department, cross-discipline planning. Some companies have claimed that going through the process of planning and carrying out an education program has led to a "culture change" within the organization, with a new view of the role of workers and the potential of investment in lifelong learning.

- Community relations: Employers have improved their image in the community, within their industries, with customers, and with their employees by sponsoring workplace basic skills programs.

- Efficiency of technical training: Workers with adequate basic skills are more likely to be able to successfully participate (and stay) in technical training programs set up by employers.

- Ability to promote from within: Companies are better able to promote experienced workers up through the ranks if those workers have the necessary basic skills to qualify for promotions. This ensures companies of a workforce already familiar with the company and reduces the risks associated with having to hire unproven workers. It can also help a company meet its equal employment opportunity goals, by retaining low-skilled workers who might otherwise have to be let go or not considered for promotion to better positions.

Benefits for labor unions

Labor unions can . . . .

- Help their members and company partners achieve the above benefits, and thereby strengthen member loyalty and the unions' bargaining position with employers.

- Strengthen their public relations.

- Incorporate union-related issues and skills into basic education activities, thereby strengthening member abilities to participate in union activities.

- Improve internal relations among those members participating in the program and others who might serve as resource persons, peer tutors, etc.

Benefits for adult education and workforce development providers

Specialists in adult education, job training, and other areas of workforce development have improved . . .

- Expertise: Workplace education programs have served as proving grounds in which not only adult educators but management and union representatives and others have developed expertise in such areas as employee basic skills education and cross-discipline planning. This expertise has been documented in print and electronic resource materials and disseminated via publications, conferences, electronic communications, graduate programs, and informal mentoring.

- Connections with other stakeholder groups: By getting involved in workplace education, adult educators have developed relationships with employers, union representatives, job-training specialists, economic development specialists, public policy makers, and other stakeholder groups. These relationships in some cases have evolved into effective means for planning and carrying out joint and better-coordinated workforce development efforts (Belfiore, 1997).

- Career options: Some workplace education programs have led educators and others involved to create new careers for themselves as workplace education specialists. Some graduate students have gained valuable field experience by working in workplace education programs.

- Markets for workplace education materials and services: Recognizing that there is at least a small -- but potentially growing -- market for workplace education materials and services, publishers and consulting agencies have created and sold new products for that market.

- Access to funding: By demonstrating the potential of work-related adult education, adult educators have improved their access to funders (public and private) interested in investing in workforce development.

Benefits cited for work-related adult education efforts outside the workplace

There has been less documentation of work-related adult basic education programs delivered outside the workplace for employed and unemployed populations. However, studies suggest that education (up to community-college level) is the best single strategy to help the unemployed and under-employed people get jobs, and do well in them:

> *(Adult education) remains the welfare to work strategy most clearly linked to long term employment impacts. Moreover, even for individuals who succeed at getting jobs, education remains central to the ability to advance on the job and to lift oneself above the ranks of the working poor (D'Amico, August 1997, p. iv).*

Several pilot projects have demonstrated how adult education can be combined with technical training and other services to help welfare recipients get and hold good jobs. Well-planned adult education programs can provide education geared directly to learners' needs; help them develop an interest in learning, an understanding of what they need to do to succeed in work, and hope for self-improvement; help participants develop regular attendance and other good work habits; provide links to employers and jobs; give participants on-the-job experience along with personal counseling and mentoring to ensure they succeed; and help learners deal with childcare and other issues which are potential obstacles to steady employment (D'Amico, August 1997, v).

Part III

Calls for New, Integrated Approaches to Workforce Development and Workplace Change

As shown in Part II, work-related adult basic education has many potential benefits for workers, employers, unions, and communities. But the future of this form of adult education to a great degree now lies in the hands of those designing workforce development systems at the state and local level and at the level of individual workplaces. It is in these arenas where decisions will be made about whether and how to invest in work-related adult basic education.

As stated in Part I, adult basic education is for the most part not currently being given much attention by decision-makers in those arenas. However, the good news for proponents of adult basic education is that decision makers are being told to be more comprehensive and customer-oriented as they put together workforce development systems. If policy makers do in fact do so, they will likely "discover" the issue of adult basic skills and include adult basic education in the new systems now being created.

Shown below are current arguments for integrated workforce development systems. They suggest that, if adult learners want to improve their job prospects and be more productive, adult education needs to be more tied in with the job markets of the communities they live in or with the system of the workplaces they work in.

Arguments for integrating adult education in community-level workforce development systems

The logic of an integrated approach to getting underemployed people into jobs with living wages is currently being widely promoted by workforce policy analysts. Reports (See Appendix A, "References Cited") from the American Society for Training and Development, the National Governors' Association, the National Alliance of Business, organized labor, the National Skill Standards Board, and job-training researchers (Grubb, 1996) all cite a fragmented, inefficient employment training system, characterized by low-intensity, "one-shot" services which don't support each other.

These analysts point to the following kinds of problems in the current workforce preparation system for adults and out-of-school youth:

- Remedial education programs are geared to GED preparation and nothing else.

- Vocational-technical training programs are short term and focus on entry-level work unconnected to anything else, whether better jobs, higher level technical training, or remedial education.

- Learners get help with job search without also developing the skills and work

experience they need to succeed in, keep, and move up in jobs (Grubb, 1996).

As Paul Cole, AFL-CIO representative to the National Skill Standards Board, puts it, we need to move from the current . . .

> *. . . plethora of programs serving targeted groups of individuals to a comprehensive, integrated system serving emerging workers, current workers, and transitional workers. The public policy mistake the United States has made is to identify a group or class of workers or job seekers, create a categorical program designed to meet their needs and authorize a funding stream -- almost always inadequate -- to fund the program. As a result, there has been the creation of a large number of programs with their own constituencies, resulting in often duplicative, overlapping, and inconsistent sets of rules and regulations. This had made it difficult to administer, a challenge for workers and jobseekers to navigate, and complicated for employers to use. Our economic competitors, predominantly in Europe, have taken a different approach. They have created national systems based on industry-recognized skill standards, assessments and certifications, coupled with a rational labor market exchange system, to serve all and worked to insure access to that system by those with special needs (Cole, 1997, p. 4).*

These writers argue that it is not enough to simply improve separate pieces of the existing, fragmented education and training system. Doing so would merely continue the current "piecemeal approach" (Grubb, 1996, p. 105). This current "system" is not in fact very systematic and is characterized by low-intensity, "one-shot" services which don't support each other.

As an alternative, these sources call for a new, "integrated" system which recognizes that:

> *. . . virtually the only way to get low-income individuals out of poverty or off welfare is to get them into education programs, like the certificate and associate degree programs of community colleges that have prospects for enhancing earnings. The disconnection of education from job training, rooted in the creation of job training programs during the 1960s, has been counterproductive for both. . . .The trick to creating an overall education and job training system from the currently disjointed systems is to fashion these links systematically, in "ladders" of education and training opportunities that can move individuals from their existing levels of accomplishment to higher levels at which they prepare for jobs of increasing skill, earnings, and stability (Grubb, 1996, p. 106).*

This new system for helping adults and out-of-school youth succeed in work would include such features as:

- A mixture of types of "academic" (basic skills) instruction and vocational skills training.

- The connection of every program to the next in a hierarchy of education and training opportunities. Each level would be geared to learners with particular skill needs and would have a range of services (basic skills education; technical training; employability skills training; academic, career, and personal counseling; work experience; child care; transportation; health care; etc.) appropriate for that level of learner. These levels would be connected by "vertical ladders," which would allow learners to move up to higher levels of skills and jobs.

Planners of the system would have to think carefully to ensure an appropriate fit ("articulation") between the various levels of this system and between the services provided at each level. Each education and training provider would have to take care to define what they have to offer and where those learning opportunities best fit in this integrated, hierarchical system. This puts providers in the position of having to see themselves as part of a system, not just a collection of unrelated or competing parts (Grubb, 1996, p. 112).

"Employability" curricula should be provided to all learners who participate in this system, to help them understand how the system works and what they need to do to move through the system and into good jobs. Employability training should also show learners how to ensure that they stay in those jobs once they get them and avoid the mistakes which often lead to people losing their jobs. The decision-making skills imbedded in employability training are also applicable to decisions which learners face in their families, communities, and other non-workplace contexts.

- Applied (contextualized) approaches to learning which borrow from good adult education practice. These might include mentoring, team-learning, self-directed learning, modelling, project-based learning, job shadowing, simulations, and revising of work processes. (These are seen as different from the traditional "transfer" mode of learning.) Adults can't, for example, learn how to make decisions or work in a team by filling in blanks in workbooks.

- Real decision-making authority for employers and other stakeholders in setting program goals and monitoring progress.

- Focus on new kinds of basic skills like computer literacy ("access" skills), learn-to-learn ("inquiry") skills, and interpersonal skills (including team leadership).

- Mechanisms for helping the older workforce pass its knowledge and skills on to newer workers.

- Rewarding of workers (e.g., by providing them with meaningful certification, access to better jobs, or company stock) for attaining particular skills.

- Using a certification process to encourage workers to gain knowledge which is both "measurable and portable." Certificates would allow workers to move across states, employers, and educational institutions. For learners to move from a lower level to a higher level in the system, they would have to demonstrate -- via skills certification -- that they have mastered the skills required to move to that level.

As the National Skill Standards Board defines them, skill standards are "the performance specifications that identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities an individual needs to succeed in the workplace." They "provide a common vocabulary to enhance communication" among key players in the workforce system, including employers, employees, job seekers, and education and job-training providers (National Skill Standards Board, p. 1).

If a learner is certified to have achieved certain skills standards, he or she can use that certification to move around the system, in and out of jobs, back and forth between jobs and education and training (Grubb,1996, p. 112). Programs would tell learners what comes next and what they need to learn if they wish to move on to a higher level of employment or education/training. This is consistent with the labor market in which "certain barriers can be overcome only through specific education credentials" (Grubb, ibid, p. 114).

Note, however, that developing appropriate skills standards and certification mechanisms is a complicated task whose expense might outweigh whatever benefits are achieved. There is also the danger that standards will be too narrow or rigid or will be perceived by learners and service providers as artificial (not reflecting the realities of the workplace) and imposed by employers or experts not invested in helping both workers and employers. Skill standards, while potentially helpful, must thus be approached carefully to avoid these negative possibilities.

- Use of new learning technologies (e.g., video, Internet, computers) to increase learner access to learning opportunities.

- Measuring the impacts of training by looking at whether workers learned what was taught, whether workers' job performance was improved, and whether the organization's performance has improved. This gets away from traditional evaluations which look more at "inputs" (e.g., hours in class, cost of instructors and equipment) than outputs (e.g., improved performance, improved business results).

This vision makes it clearer what the buzzwords of "collaboration," "partnership," "team," "integration," "coordination," and "articulation" might really look like. It responds to the fact that many people in the current workforce have low skill levels which require them to take only incremental steps -- with lots of support -- if they are to have any chance of moving up to better employment and quality of life. This new model also responds to those who, for economic reasons, must move back and forth between work and education. It allows learners to take bite-size chunks of education, go back to work, and then come back again later for more education.

Arguments for integrating adult education into company-level organizational development systems

Similar arguments for an "integrated approach" can be heard coming from those involved in organizational development and workplace education and technical training for incumbent workers.

The National Governors' Assocation (Simon, 1997), for example, argues that worker skills are paramount for competitiveness and that companies need to infuse training in every process and make it a part of the company's systemic approach to competition. The National Alliance of Business says that, to help that to happen, "education and training providers must take a *broad* look at companies' performance needs, and offer a *package* of services that will

address the companies' performance problems" (National Alliance of Business, 1997, p. 1).

Workplace basic education specialists have followed this logic to develop educational planning teams which conduct comprehensive workplace needs assessments to clarify a company's goals, factors supporting or blocking progress toward those goals, whether and how employee basic skills is a problem, whether and how an employee basic skills program is appropriate for that organization, and what else needs to be done in the organization (e.g., improving equipment, communication channels, or pay) to ensure that workers use what they learn in an education program (Folinsbee and Jurmo, 1994).

This approach to workplace basic education aims at building stakeholder understanding of and investment in worker education, while ensuring greater relevance of a basic skills initiative to the company's larger mission and other workplace improvement initiatives like technical training and introduction of new technologies and team-based decision-making.

This is in contrast to the too-familiar scenario in which a basic education provider is asked to "come in and run a few classes" without regard to whether those classes are really relevant to the interests of the workers and the company. The result has too often been stand-alone workplace education programs which aren't supported by the larger organization and which don't have any lasting impact for the company or employees.

The newer, team-oriented, integrated approaches to workplace basic education have many of the same features as the new integrated approach to community workforce development outlined above. These two worlds -- of community workforce development and workplace change -- have generally co-existed as parallel universes but appear now to be coming to similar conclusions about what is needed to help workers succeed in the world of work.

Part IV:

A New Vision for Integrating Adult Basic Education with Workforce Development and Workplace Change Systems

We have now been presented with evidence which suggests that (a) work-related adult basic education has many potential benefits and (b) adult education should somehow be more efficiently integrated with workforce development "systems" at the state, local, and workplace levels. If we agree with that evidence, we need to next answer the question of "how should work-related adult basic education 'fit' in workforce development and workplace change systems?"

A review of literature and interviews with leaders in the field suggest that adult educators should now aim at creating new kinds of community-level adult education systems. These systems should be structured to respond to the work-related learning needs of both employed and unemployed adults by providing services in both workplaces and non-workplace contexts. These community-level adult learning systems would be integrated with other employment-related services and opportunities in the ways described in Part III.

The elements of this "new vision" for community-level work-related learning systems are outlined below:

1. Work-related adult basic educators need to be clear about who they are trying to serve and what those "customers'" needs are.

For work-related adult education to be "customer-oriented," it is important for service deliverers to be clear who their customers are and what those customers' needs are. However, at present there is a fuzziness about who it is that work-related adult education efforts are to serve, whether conducted in the workplace or out in the community. Is it the employer who is the primary customer? Is it the individual learner? Is it some combination of both? Does the funder qualify as a "customer"? Should the focus be primarily on the unemployed or should the larger number of tax-paying employed workers be given the priority?

There is a similar lack of clarity about what the basic education-related needs of those various customers are. For example, the rhetoric of workplace literacy has often assumed that employers are only interested in ensuring that employees have very-specific skills -- like "reading job instructions" -- applicable immediately to ensure company productivity. However, assessments of workplace learning needs have revealed that the situation is often more complex and employers are not always solely interested in narrow, low-level skills tied to a few simple job tasks. Instead, many employers are looking for broader competencies traditionally referred to -- often dismissively -- as "soft" skills. These might include teamwork, conflict resolution, taking

initiative to solve problems, or "learning to learn" (understanding what you need to do to master a new task). Many employers also get involved with worker education with the hope that their employees will be able to eventually master fairly sophisticated computer technologies or math-related functions like statistical process control.

Likewise, learners are motivated by a range of needs and interests. In some cases, where education is linked to something concrete in their current jobs (like an improved product or improved job opportunities within their company), learners are "transformed," energized by the learning experience, and see themselves as valued and valuable. In other cases, employees are looking to move to better jobs outside their current company and want education which helps them get access to higher levels of education and training rather than merely doing their current (and too often unrewarding) jobs more efficiently. Learners might also need an education program to provide support services which help them deal with a dependency on welfare benefits, a resignation to low-paying jobs, or logistical obstacles like lack of transportation or childcare.

Adult education planners should in any case recognize that preparing for work is a very common reason for adult learners (especially immigrants, who typically use English more at the workplace than in other contexts) to enroll in adult education programs (Gillespie, 1996). To ensure relevant education, planners must thus take the time to uncover the specifics of the types of jobs learners are interested in, the skills and knowledge demanded by those jobs, and factors which currently block or facilitate learners' success in the world of work.

Good planning can be blocked by stereotyping and a general lack of understanding of particular segments of the workforce. For example:

- *It is too often assumed that all welfare recipients or Latinos have the same needs, all illiterates are unemployed (or vice versa), and so forth. In fact, there is typically a great deal of complexity within various segments of the workforce. Many welfare recipients might need little education or training and instead simply need access to a decent job. Foreign-born, limited-English-proficient workers might include everything from highly-educated professionals; to experienced manual workers with a long, successful work history; to people with few work skills and little work history.*

- *What about the growing number of incarcerated people who have limited skills and job prospects? Do they qualify as part of the U.S. workforce? If so, what are their learning-related needs? What are the implications for society if those needs aren't dealt with?*

- *There is also significant variation across industries in how they define "basic skills." A cook, for example, needs different skills than a production worker in an aircraft parts factory does.*

Developing strategies for entire groups while not distinguishing the different needs and abilities within them will not result in good policy.

This suggests that more-thoughtful and comprehensive needs assessments need to be conducted when planning work-related adult education efforts. If, for example, adult education is to be used for workers in a particular workplace context, then a broader workplace needs assessment needs to be carried out to determine where basic skills fit in the larger goals and plans of both the organization and individual workers. If, on the other hand, adult education is to be used outside the workplace to help learners achieve work-related goals, assessments should carefully determine both learners' job-related goals and local labor market opportunities and demands. In both cases, education planners can then develop realistic, relevant learning plans with learners. This is a way of avoiding focusing educational efforts on irrelevant, unobtainable, or otherwise inappropriate objectives.

The good news is that the National Institute for Literacy (through its Equipped for the Future initiative), the National Skill Standards Board, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), and others have been developing frameworks which the field can use to further clarify the skill needs of particular populations in specific work contexts. The considerable work of these national institutions should be made accessible to the field so it can be adapted effectively.

2. Stakeholders should be actively involved via an ongoing, collaborative decision-making process.

Virtually every report on workforce education and development stresses the need for "collaboration" or "partnerships" among those involved. Those players are often called "stakeholders" on the assumption that they have some kind of vested interest in the educational effort.

But forming and maintaining an effective working relationship among multiple parties is not easy. It requires special team-process expertise, a common vision, time, channels for smooth communication, and a willingness to discard counter-productive turf and stereotypes. Historically those groups now expected to work together in community workforce development boards and workplace literacy programs have not developed such collaborative tools. Those now wishing to form effective partnerships for planning and monitoring of workforce education efforts will need to set aside time to learn how to do so and put the required elements in place. This requires negotiation of common goals, responsibilities, and a timeline of activities.

Once a good working relationship is put in place, it needs to be nurtured and facilitated by one or more team leaders. Partners must be patient and allow relationships to gel, trust to be created, and roles to be clarified. (There are plenty of guidelines for team development which workforce education planning bodies can learn from.)

Community-level adult educators should explore working with other stakeholder groups to develop a community adult learning plan which is responsive to all constituent needs, based on a broad assessment of learning needs of all in the community. The plan should lay out a range of possible services which could be developed and continuously improved over time. Such a plan and process could provide the basis for a real "system"

rather than a collection of separate programs untied to a network of constituencies.

Whether to plan a workplace basic skills program or a community workforce education system, an effective planning body can help with needs assessment, goal-setting, development of assessment and evaluation tools, curriculum development, learner recruitment, fundraising, and general trouble shooting (continuous improvement). Without such involvement of stakeholders, educators are likely to be groping in the dark, trying to figure out how to make educational activities relevant, struggling to fit education into the busy schedules of learners and employers, and missing out on the potentially-valuable input and follow-up support which employers and learners' co-workers and other service providers can provide.

It will also be important for workforce educators to reach out to the community groups which historically have been most blocked from good jobs by lack of education and other barriers. By doing so, those groups will be more likely to be served and workforce education efforts will be able to expand the political constituency for lifelong learning.

And, finally, representatives of particular stakeholder groups (e.g., corporate human resource development or technical training specialists, heads of small businesses, or union leaders) might form their own networks to share strategies for dealing with their particular education-related concerns. (Massachusetts, for example, has business and labor consortia which advocate for work-related adult education, identify learning needs of the state's businesses and unions, and coordinate training for those who carry out worker education services.)

3. Learning objectives need to be clear, realistic, relevant, based on a careful needs assessment, and tied to agreed-on standards.

Assuming that the planners of a work-related adult education effort have gone through the needs assessment process described in #1 above, they should now have a general understanding of what needs the effort should respond to, at least in its initial stages. Planners must now identify a number of learning objectives which respond to those needs.

For example, an initial needs assessment for a group of unionized immigrant women garment workers might show that they have a number of needs which an education program might help them deal with. The women might need to:

a. develop basic oral communications skills in English, to enable them to meet and greet and feel comfortable speaking with English-speaking supervisors, co-workers, union officials, and customers;

b. understand the dynamics of U.S. workplaces and their rights and responsibilities as workers and union members;

c. understand safety procedures; payroll deductions; and procedures for filing medical claims, requesting vacations and sick time, and dealing with immigration regulations;

d. develop strategies for dealing with child-care and elder-care responsibilities and transportation difficulties;

e. develop strategies for dealing with sexual harrassment or conflicts with co-workers from other cultures;

f. learn what other kinds of learning opportunities (e.g., television, parent-child activities at their children's school) they can get involved with, for their own benefit and that of their families.

Such a needs analysis points to the need for something other than a traditional, generic "ESOL program" which teaches a few words of English or a "reading" program which focuses solely on mastering a few workplace labels or signs. What is needed in this case is a number of educational activities -- some of which might be carried out in the workers' native languages -- which focus on helping those learners meet the above needs. For each set of needs, planners need to work with the learners to set a number of achievable objectives which guide the learners and education staff from where the learners currently are to where they need to go.

Objectives should be arranged incrementally (e.g., beginning-level ESOL learners might begin with simple goals like "speaking up" or "answering the phone"), to allow learners to take clear steps. These steps can in turn be documented and can demonstrate progress to both learners, education staff, and funders. Learning activities can be organized around these clear objectives, to make best use of the time available to learners and educators.

By linking objectives to larger learner needs in these ways, planners can (a) keep stakeholders focused on relevant, do-able results and (b) show incremental progress which encourages learners and educators and ensures funders that investment is paying off.

Once an educational effort gets underway, learners' interests and abilities will likely change, as will the demands and opportunities of the workplaces they are preparing for. For these reasons, education program planners need to regularly revisit their original objectives so they can be added to, revised, or perhaps discarded. This will keep the educational effort relevant.

As planners develop objectives for work-related adult learning activities, they might tie them in with the standards now being developed by the National Institute for Literacy's Equipped for the Future initiative, the National Skill Standards Board, and related projects by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) and the American Society for Training and Development which developed lists of skills employers want in the workforce. All of these projects have focused on the question of what skills, knowledge, and attributes workers need to be productive and employable.

By using and shaping common concepts, language, and frameworks across education programs, industries, and geographic locations, work-related adult educators can help learners develop transferrable skills and knowledge and credentials they can

bring with them to various job situations. Rather than solely focus on a limited number of job skills for immediate jobs, work-related adult education curricula might also focus on "career building" ("learner-centered self-management") skills). Learners can then move beyond "Spartan endurance" (resignation to a low-wage, low-status existence).

4. Mechanisms for individual assessment and program evaluation need to efficiently document results and enable stakeholders to make decisions about "next steps."

Procedures need to be put in place which enable learners, education staff, and others to determine whether agreed-on objectives are being met and whether unanticipated results are also being achieved. This will likely require programs to re-do how they assess learner progress. As Merrifield puts it:

> *You should measure what you value and value what you measure . . . programs should be collecting data they can use, and whose value they understand and appreciate. This could impact the quality of services and the quality of data (Merrifield, Chapter 3, p. 5).*

Programs must decide whether they want to document only what learners are demonstrating in the classroom or whether they also want to show whether, how, and with what impact learners are applying what they learn to real-world tasks outside the classroom. The resulting evidence of "how learners are doing" should then be fed to program decision-makers, possibly via the collaborative decision-making bodies described in #2 above. Stakeholders can then decide whether to continue investing in the program and, if so, what needs to be done to improve the effort.

Educators might also help learners develop "work portfolios" which learners can carry with them from job to job and education program to education program. In these portfolios they would carry evidence of the skills and knowledge they have developed. These portfolios might be organized around the kinds of transferrable work skills now being developed by the Equipped for the Future initiative. More work needs to be done to develop new ways of assessing and documenting work-related skills relevant to learners.

Experience with workplace literacy programs indicates that it is very difficult -- and perhaps of questionable value -- to try to "measure return-on-investment," at least in the ways that economists have traditionally used. It will be important to track learners over time to determine the real impact of education and training on learners' job performance and employability, but this will require all concerned to reconsider what are reasonable, fair goals to focus on. In the case of unemployed learners, is merely placing a learner in a low-wage job enough? Or should we be aiming at significantly improving -- and tracking -- learners' employment status over a number of years? Where the focus is on improving the job performance of employed workers, we need to carefully define what it takes to be a productive worker and then figure out in what ways adult education can help workers be more productive.

It is not reasonable to expect learners to make major leaps in job status or productivity merely due to participation in short, non-intensive education programs. Put another way, accountability is important, but it needs to be realistic and reasonable, focusing on achievable and meaningful outcomes, especially given the limited resources available. The challenge is to find appropriate, reliable ways of documenting learner progress and program impact over time, to show to stakeholders what goals to focus on, which practices work and which don't, and where investment should be targeted.

5. Multiple learning opportunities need to be provided which allow learners to devote the time they need to achieve their learning objectives.

To respond to a range of learning needs in an individual, community, or workplace, education providers need to be prepared to provide a range of learning opportunities which should . . .

. . . be arranged in a clear sequence of adult education services, organized in a logical hierarchy from beginning to advanced levels of basic skills.

. . . include a range of learning formats (e.g., small "learning teams" which focus on solving common work-related problems while also improving their basic skills; project-based learning; "job clubs" whose members work together to learn about, prepare for, and apply for jobs; computer-assisted instruction; individualized tutoring; and libraries of video and print resource materials).

. . . include special curricula and services geared to learners' particular needs and job opportunities and the contexts they operate in. (For example, an immigrant community with special dietary preferences and restrictions might have a special need to license butchers who can qualify for a butcher's license. A training program could be set up to help people from their community to get those qualifications and thereby get jobs and provide a service to that community. Similarly, women from that community might need training to be certified to work in childcare centers catering to children from that group.)

. . . emphasize clear, relevant standards for moving from one level to the next.

. . . draw on research about what constitutes "good practice" for work-related adult learning.

This pluralistic approach acknowledges that adult learners have different amounts of time, access to learning facilities and equipment, and preferred learning styles. By giving learners a number of options, education programs can help learners work around constraints and find approaches to learning that work best for them.

This plurality of learning opportunities can be used at both the community level and within an individual company or union. For example, the 1199 healthcare workers union in New York City provides a range of educational services (from basic ESOL and literacy through college) for members and provides multiple opportunities for workers to

think of themselves as able to learn and advance.

6. A corps of well-prepared and well-supported professionals is needed.

These professionals should include both basic education specialists and technical trainers, career counselors and case managers, job developers, and others with the expertise, commitment, and time to provide customized educational services to meet agreed-on learning objectives. This "workforce education workforce" must be supported through professional development activities, full-time positions with benefits, research and development, and mechanisms for disseminating existing resource materials. These professionals can in turn be supported by part-timers and volunteers who receive appropriate training and support.

Work-related adult educators might also be organized in "SWAT" teams, to allow them to respond quickly to particular education-related needs in a particular company or community. Special positions might also be created at state and local levels for "brokers" or workplace learning needs assessment specialists who would help communities or companies identify their work-related learning needs and plan appropriate responses.

Adult educators need to be trained not just in curriculum-related functions but in such administrative duties as negotiating contracts, cost analysis, budgeting, and pro-rating. Teachers need to be paid for preparation and assessment time, so they can take the results of a workplace needs assessment and then do learning plans customized to individual workers and workplaces. Adult educators need to learn how to be team leaders, personal growth facilitators, career counselors, and teacher-researchers. Staff development is vital, as people are being asked to do jobs no one has had to do before. (This blurring of traditional professional boundaries is, in one observer's words, "good but confusing.") Appropriate training and paid planning time can help newcomers to work-related education avoid the shock of workplace realities and the need to "fake it."

Those involved in this work should also organize themselves for advocacy purposes -- and to simply raise the profile of work-related adult education as a profession -- through special interest groups within existing professional organizations or perhaps through new ones created just for these purposes.

7. Efficient administrative and curricular linkages must be made between adult education and other services and opportunities within the system.

The collaborative relationships, needs assessment and goal-setting procedures, and evaluation mechanisms described above are ways to build communication and a "fit" between adult educators and other stakeholder groups and service providers at both the community and workplace levels. This is important so that adult education providers and learners don't operate in isolation from other useful services (like technical training, transportation and childcare) and job opportunities that learners can benefit from. In the words of one workforce development coordinator: "We need to blur those lines and get communication going."

Adult educators should make special efforts to get to know job developers, workforce development board members, career counselors, school-to-work specialists, vocational instructors, and others working in the area of economic development. They might be invited into the adult education classroom as observers, guest speakers, or curriculum advisors. This interaction can help create and strengthen the connections which practitioners and learners have to other parts of a better-integrated system. Adult education and these other fields are specialty areas which have much in common, can support each other, and should be working with each other but historically haven't.

Planners should borrow from Grubb's (1996) model of a workforce development and employment system (described earlier), which links education , training, and economic development agencies, employers, and workers together vertically via what Grubb calls "ladders" and horizontally through what might be called "cross-walks."

These linkages would in particular give adult educators and learners better access to information about real job opportunities, so that learners prepare for rewarding, available jobs rather than for non-existent or dead-end ones.

These linkages can be made via a number of mechanisms, including:

- *Electronic databases which list available services (e.g., education, training, transportation, healthcare, and childcare), workers, and jobs. These databases should be staffed by referral experts who know and input the information in the database and can -- in a customer-friendly way -- refer people to the right information and contacts.*

- *Listservs which allow those with common interests to communicate quickly.*

- *Well-run collaborative decision-making boards where representatives of various stakeholder groups can formally and informally share information and otherwise support each other.*

- *Cross-training of personnel in various institutions, to help service providers and employers break down (and in some cases eliminate) unproductive barriers and revise the services they provide to make them relevant to customer needs. (Technical trainers might, for example, learn how to communicate technical information more effectively to foreign-born workers. Family literacy specialists can learn how to weave work-related topics into their curricula, to respond to parents' desires to be able to earn a living for their families.) The National Institute for Literacy's interagency staff development project explored how cross-training can be provided across agencies which serve adult learners.*

- *Involving various agencies in joint needs assessment and goal-setting, to ensure that agencies serving the same learners agree on (a) what those learners need, (b) who will be responsible for which needs, and (c) what methodologies will be used. This will help those involved to better coordinate their efforts and avoid conflicting, confusing, or redundant goals and activities. (West Virginia has local-level "design*

teams" composed of multiple stakeholders who design education and training strategies customized to the needs of a company moving into that community.)

- *Site visits by, for example, learners in a community literacy program to a local workplace (to learn how it works and what skills are required) or staff from a job-training or -placement agency to an adult basic education center.*

- *Co-locating of several related services in one workforce development center. Unions in New York City and Massachusetts jointly operate education programs in common learning centers. Elsewhere, companies and unions sponsor local workforce development centers where workers upgrade various kinds of work-related skills and get certificates of mastery which they can then present to prospective employers. (Employers are thus saved the expense of recruiting unprepared workers. They instead know that they can go to a local center where they have some assurance that graduates have the basic skills the employers are looking for.)*

- *Travelling workplace education "brokers" whose job it is to assess needs, maintain communications, make referrals, and facilitate cooperation and problem-solving across various institutions involved in workforce preparation and employment.*

- *Use of successful graduates from adult basic skills programs to (a) recruit new learners, and (b) explain and promote adult basic education to other potential supporters and collaborators for adult education, including other service providers, employers, unions, and funders.*

8. Appropriate learning facilities and technologies need to be in place to enable busy adults to learn at convenient times and locations.

Just as adult learners need access to multiple kinds of learning opportunities, so do they need multiple sites and technologies to make those learning opportunities available to them. While familiar "adult schools" (typically found in public school facilities) will likely continue as learning sites in most communities, busy adults (and adults who might prefer less-conspicuous places to pursue adult basic education) might also learn at home, at their workplaces, in union facilities, or at a local library or community college. Planners must balance the need for consolidation and centralization with other variables important to adult learners like ease of access, the "friendliness" of the learning environment, and confidentiality.

When computer-assisted instruction first came on the adult education scene in the mid-1980s, many were concerned that computers were merely conveying irrelevant, decontextualized, rote drill-and-practice instruction in an electronic format. While questionable computer-assisted curricula still abound, innovative adult educators have developed new forms of electronic learning -- including uses of the Internet and video technologies -- which respond to adults' interest in mastering computer technology while giving them access to learning opportunities undreamed of a decade ago. In some

workplace basic education programs, for example, learners practice reading, writing, math, researching, problem-solving, and other "SCANS skills" on computers like those they need in their jobs. Mastery of computer technologies is a requirement for a growing number of good jobs, and it is thus that much more important to provide opportunities for computer-related learning for adult learners hoping to move into better employment.

9. Sustained, consistent, and adequate investment of resources is needed, along with incentive structures which encourage such investment.

Some argue that the historical lack of investment in adult education will exacerbate efforts to introduce the innovations now required to build a new system. Nonetheless, for the above innovations to happen, investments will be needed of:

- *Funds, in-kind resources, and time from public and private sector decision-makers, and*

- *Time and effort by participating adult learners.*

To encourage decision-makers and learners to make those investments, it would be useful to know (via surveys of private- and public-sector decision-makers) why they have to date not invested much in work-related adult education and what would have to be in place to get them to invest.

Advocates for work-related adult education might also explore establishing a number of incentives and rewards to encourage investment, including:

- *Tax incentives to encourage (a) employers to hire hard-to-employ workers and then train them and (b) learners to pursue educational opportunities.*

- *Tuition breaks and scholarships to workers who participate in education programs.*

- *Recognition of achievement via awards issued to learners, employers, unions, and others by public policy makers, professional groups, the news media, and other sources.*

- *Certification of mastery which allows learners to demonstrate mastery of particular skills and knowledge and to qualify for higher educational and job opportunities.*

- *Certification of investment for companies who invest in workforce development. (This could be modelled after the "Investors in People" program in the United Kingdom. Companies go through a formal assessment -- similar to ISO certification -- to demonstrate that they are investing in the development of their human resources. When certified as an "Investor in People," a company can advertise this fact to its customers and community, as they would if they won a Baldridge Award or similar "quality" recognition in the U.S.)*

- *Pay-for-knowledge mechanisms which reward workers with higher pay or better*

jobs if they demonstrate mastery of particular skills (Hart-Landsberg and Reder, 1997).

- *<u>Tuition assistance</u> provided by employers or unions to workers who successfully complete agreed-on educational activities.*

- *<u>Holding employers or education providers accountable</u> if they don't uphold the terms of a workplace basic skills program they receive funding for.*

- *<u>Rewriting of RFPs</u> to require and reward effective practice rather than "business as usual."*

These incentives are at present new ideas which will require further research and development.

Advocates should also look in non-traditional places for work-related adult education funding. Departments of labor, economic development, and human services are struggling to deal with welfare-reform and job-creation, and are potentially more motivated to pay attention to work-related adult education than are departments of education which equate "education" with "schools and children." Rather than bemoan the lack of interest in work-related adult education by traditional sources, advocates might learn from the experience of Massachusetts which, after its federal workplace literacy funding ended in late 1997, found funds -- with organized labor's help -- to replace it from state sources.

10. Mechanisms need to be put in place to <u>protect the rights of workers</u>.

Some cases have been documented in which workers who reveal their need for basic education services have been fired, denied promotions, or ridiculed by co-workers or supervisors. There also appears to be a tendency for some employers to artificially inflate the academic credentials required for hiring or promotion (D'Amico, 1996, Castellano, 1997).

Sometimes this might be due to ignorance on the part of employers who assume, for example, that a particular job requires "a high school diploma" when in fact non-high-school graduates are quite capable of performing the job. In other cases, this might be a conscious strategy to control the wage levels and access to employment for populations from low-income communities.

Some vocational education programs are creating unnecessary barriers which have the effect of excluding limited-English-proficient adults from participating. These programs are using standardized basic skills tests in English as a gatekeeper for entry into the program. Many limited-English-proficient students could instead receive concurrent English language and vocational skills training, rather than have to first master English before moving into vocational training. This concurrent model has been shown to help students learn English faster and to move into better jobs. Guidelines should be set by the field to ensure that workers are not unfairly excluded from job or training opportunities because of a lack of education. In Canada, unions have promoted the notion that adults

-- like children -- have a right to a good education. Such discussions might be held in the United States, as well.

11. State-level supports are needed for local-level efforts.

The preceding recommendations for the most part talk about what is needed at the level of a community or individual workplace to provide well-designed work-related adult education services. State-level institutions -- including state government, business, and organized labor -- need to also provide various kinds of technical and financial support to the agencies, employers, and unions involved at the local level.

State-level institutions (like a state workforce development board, a state Chamber of Commerce, or a state-level AFL-CIO office) can collect information from their local contacts about workforce education needs, convey it to resource persons who can help respond to those needs (through curriculum design and professional development activities), and facilitate cost-effective linkages between state-level resource persons and local entities in need of help.

Business and labor organizations can also serve important advocacy roles to generate public and private sector awareness of the potential of work-related adult education and investment in it.

All of this will require state-level leaders -- in government, business, labor, and other institutions -- who take the time to educate themselves about the basic skills needs of the state's workforce and the implications for the economy and society. Decision-makers should also get up to speed on the new concepts and forms of adult education which have emerged in the last decade, as many adult educators have moved away from the "remedial," "charity," and "GED prep" identities of the past. Decision-makers need to learn the innovative ways that adult education can help if given the right supports.

However, state-level leaders in government, business, and labor are busy and aren't necessarily motivated to take a historically-low-priority issue like adult basic skills seriously. For this reason, those who believe in the importance of adult basic education will need to organize a statewide advocacy effort. Advocates can light a fire under decision makers who have until now been cool toward -- in the dark about -- the need to invest in lifelong learning.

Part V

Making Adult Basic Education an Effective Piece of Integrated Systems: What National-Level Decision Makers Can Do

Making the transition from the current system to the new and improved one outlined in Part IV will require leadership, new thinking, and investment by decision makers in both the public and private sectors. While much of this will have to occur at state and local levels and within individual workplaces, national-level leadership is also needed within . . .

> . . . *the federal government (in various agencies concerned with education, labor, and economic development and the U.S. Congress which funds them);*
>
> . . . *the business community (e.g., the National Alliance of Business, the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Management Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, major corporations, and national trade associations);*
>
> . . . *organized labor (e.g., the AFL-CIO and national union headquarters);*
>
> . . . *the adult education and training fields (e.g., the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, the National Coalition for Literacy, the American Society for Training and Development).*

National-level leaders can help set direction and provide information and resources to help state- and local-level decision-makers effectively integrate adult basic education into workforce development and organizational change.

Unfortunately, despite significant experience gained from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, work-related adult basic education has more recently largely been ignored at the national level, as the federal government, business community, and organized labor have backed away from initiatives they had previously invested in. (To name a few, remember the Business Council for Effective Literacy? The National Workplace Literacy Program? The media coverage of the literacy issue provided by the broadcast and print industries? The workplace basic skills initiatives of the banking, print, and home-building industries?)

While some individuals in national-level institutions have tried to carry the torch for work-related adult education in recent years, they have been somewhat lonely figures in a landscape now focused on other areas of workforce development. For this to change, new, well-informed, and committed leadership is needed.

National-level leaders now have a choice:

Option 1: You now reconsider how adult basic education can best be used by the emerging state- and local-level workforce development systems and by employers and unions at the workplace level.

Option 2: You continue to ignore this issue and hope that individual states, companies, and unions will somehow figure out on their own what to do to improve the basic skills of the workforces they are responsible for.

This final part of the monograph is written for those at the national level who want to pursue Option 1. Here are some recommendations:

Step 1: Prepare yourself for a leadership role.

Despite the need and potential for work-related adult education, there is currently only a vague vision and limited support for building a better-integrated national system for workforce development and workplace change, of which adult education would be an important component.

For this to change, new leadership will be needed at the national level. If you are to take on a leadership role in creating new national policy for work-related adult education, you will need to be well-informed about what has already been done in this area and you will need a vision to guide you.

Here are some steps you can take to prepare to take a lead in this area:

Step 1.a.: Educate yourself about the potential and requirements of well-planned work-related adult education.

Part II describes ways that well-planned adult basic education can help develop the workforce (both employed and unemployed workers) and help workplaces improve themselves.

Unfortunately, many of those who are in a position to create new policy for adult education and workforce development are simply unfamiliar with the potential of work-related adult education. To rectify this lack of institutional memory, those with an interest in creating new policy should educate themselves by, first, reading the kinds of reports listed in Appendix A. You should look beyond the familiar, frequently-cited reports and concepts developed years ago and consider the new thinking generated in more-recent research.

Note that the world of work has changed since the original wave of workplace basic skills efforts got underway in the mid-1980s. With those changes, workers are expected to have new, higher, and more-complex kinds of skills. This requires greater

investment in ongoing worker training and education, with a special emphasis on enabling workers to be flexible and portable across job tasks and across companies. Worker education should thus be seen as something positive, an important component of helping companies shift toward high-performance organizations. Workers can, in turn, transfer what they learn in the workplace to tasks they face as family and community members.

Policy makers also need to understand that such benefits take time, and adult education should not be seen as a quick-fix solution. It is rather a vehicle for ongoing development of workers and continuous improvement of workplaces. Adult education should also not be seen as a stand-alone solution to a company's or workforce's problems. It is, rather, something to be woven into other activities like technical training, career counseling, and so forth.

Talk with employers, union representatives, adult educators, and workers who have been involved in successful work-related basic skills programs. (See Appendix B.) Ask them to tell you how they and other stakeholders benefitted and to describe the supports they needed to achieve what they did. Invite these resource persons to participate in the meetings and conferences described in Step 2, to learn from their experience.

Step 1.b.: Develop your own vision of an integrated workforce development and learning system.

For adult education to achieve the benefits described in Part II will require something like the new, better integrated system proposed in Part IV. As you prepare to help others to develop such a system, you should first take the time to develop your own vision of what an integrated system would look like.

Parts III and IV present models of integrated workforce development and workplace learning systems now being circulated by various policy analysts and researchers. These proponents are aware that previous national job training and workplace education initiatives were often not as efficient or effective as they might have been.

These proponents for a new, "systems" approach to workforce development and workplace learning argue that . . .

> *"System" need not be synonymous with bureaucracy or with providing services for the lowest common denominator. (Rather), "system" (suggests) shared goals and standards that ensure a return on investment for individuals and organizations; universal access to best practices to avoid reinvention and unnecessary start-up costs and mistakes; and options for partnerships and cooperative networks that can create economies of scale and serve disparate and dispersed clients. If public- and private-sector job training sytems are to integrate, both sides need access to this common pool of information (McCain and Pantazis, p. 32).*

The American Society for Training and Development states that the . . .

. . . federal government must articulate a vision, and facilitate the coordination of the infrastructure needed to support a system capable of providing universal access to services and programs which promote continuous learning and ongoing skills development. Policymakers must examine how to efficiently utilize programs and systems that are in place in order to identify successes, failures, and needs. The goal is to promote opportunity -- not bureaucracy -- while involving all levels of government (ibid, p. 33).

In that spirit, you should develop your own vision for the role that adult basic education can play in efforts to improve the productivity and economic prospects of the U.S. workforce and the quality of U.S. workplaces. Do this by, first, studying the arguments presented in Parts III and IV of this report, and then asking yourself these questions:

1. What roles should adult basic education play in (a) community-level workforce development initiatives and (b) local companies' efforts to improve their workplace operations?

2. To do a good job in these two areas, what program components ("best practices") do adult educators need to have in place?

By thinking these questions through on your own (and perhaps through discussions with colleagues), you will have a working draft of a vision to guide you as you take the next steps of fostering such discussion among others.

Step 2: Create forums where workforce education and training policy is discussed.

Currently, the issues dealt with in this monograph are being discussed in a number of settings, including:

- the offices of national-level institutions in the federal government, organized labor, the business community, and adult education and training organizations;

- national conferences (like the international Workplace Learning Conference organized by the University of Wisconsin and the conferences of the National Alliance for Business and the AFL-CIO's Human Resources Development Institute);

- Internet communications (There are several listservs -- including a workplace literacy listserv sponsored by the National Institute for Literacy -- where adult educators discuss the connection of adult basic education to welfare reform and organizational development. Several adult education and training clearinghouses -- including the National Center for Research in Vocational Education and the ERIC Clearinghouse at Ohio State University -- make research on these topics available via the Internet.)

- Research being conducted by -- to name a few -- the National Skill Standards Board, the National Governors' Association, the National Institute for Literacy, the National Workforce Assistance Collaborative (coordinated by the National Alliance of Business

with U.S. Department of Labor funding), the National Center for Research on Vocational Education, and the Center for Applied Linguistics.

On the surface, it appears that -- with this abundance of institutions and individuals focusing on work-related adult education and training -- the topic should be pretty well covered. In fact, this large number of initiatives has the advantage of allowing people to think through how best to tackle pieces of the workforce development and workplace change puzzles. The unfortunate down side of this is that most of these efforts remain somewhat isolated from each other, appealing to specialized audiences (adult educators vs. technical trainers vs. school-to-work specialists vs. union educators, etc.), and focusing on particular issues of concern to one group but not necessarily the other.

The result is a national-level version of the state-level problem of disjointed workforce development efforts that recent federal legislation has been trying to rectify. Put another way, national-level decision-makers are not practicing what they are preaching to the states: form multi-stakeholder decision-making bodies which will clarify the full range of workforce development and workplace change needs, map out a strategy for dealing with them, allocate resources for better-coordinated workforce and workplace improvement initiatives, and continually improve those efforts over time.

Here are ways that you can take leadership on dealing with this problem of disjointed planning:

a. Help decision-makers recognize the need for integration.

Point out to national-level decision-makers that a number of national sources are pushing for better-integrated workforce development systems at the state level, but that such a system has not been developed yet at the national level. Explain that, in such a system, current disjointed efforts would learn from each other, be better coordinated, and use resources more effectively. Ask them to identify factors in the system which currently support or block integration. Draw on existing evaluations of job training and workplace basic skills programs to identify lessons learned about how to integrate services.

b. Use existing forums to communicate.

Encourage those involved in existing policy forums to put new emphasis on communicating and working with groups and institutions that they historically have not worked with. They should use existing forums to foster cross-fertilization. Adult educators might, for example, invite job-training specialists to speak at their conferences and focus, in particular, on how these two fields might better work together.

c. Create new forums for integrated planning.

If no existing national-level body provides opportunities to plan for a better-integrated national system, then a new entity might need to be created. One idea now being proposed is for the national-level offices of the federal and private-sector

institutions concerned with workforce development and workplace improvement to establish a new decision-making body with a title like "The National Council on Workforce Education and Training."

This Council might include representatives from the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, and Commerce, and from the Internal Revenue Service and Small Business Administration. Other participants might come from federally-funded organizations like the National Skill Standards Board and the National Governors' Association. The business, labor, and adult education and training communities would likewise be represented.

The Council would conduct "New Vision" symposiums, concurrent with the passing of new workforce development legislation, to discuss the recommendations of this and other related reports. The symposiums would focus on a common set of questions similar to those you asked yourself in Step 1.b. By so doing, the many disparate groups now working in isolation from each other would be better able to understand what they are currently doing and then reach a consensus about new, better-integrated directions for their efforts. The Council would also assist states in the implementation of new workforce development initiatives.

Venues for the symposiums could include:

- *The White House Conference on Lifelong Learning (December 1998);*
- *The Workplace Learning Conference (May 1999);*
- *Annual meetings of state adult, vocational, and job training directors;*
- *Annual conferences of related national- and state-level organizations (e.g., the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, the National Alliance of Business, the American Society for Training and Development).*

Feedback from those symposiums would go back to the Council which would, in turn, incorporate that feedback into a new national vision.

Step 3: Figure out what supports national-level policy makers should provide to adult educators.

The above "visioning" will identify the components of a better-integrated national system for workforce education and training. The next step will be to figure out what supports those involved in creating such a system will need to plan, sustain, and continuously improve it.

Policy makers need to realize that adult educators have historically not had the resources they need to put together and sustain services responsive to the work-related learning needs of their communities. Where work-related services have been provided, they have too often relied on short-term grants and "quickie" interventions. These short-term investments don't allow adult educators to build the relationships with local workers, employers, and service providers needed to create longer-term involvement in lifelong learning.

You might now return to the adult educators you have interacted with in Steps 1 and 2

and ask them this question: "For you to put together and sustain relevant, high-quality work-related adult education services in your community, what supports do you need?"

Once you have gotten this feedback from those who will be doing the work of building community-level work-related learning systems, consider the following list of needed supports identified by sources around the nation. This list identifies both the supports which adult educators need and the roles which national-level policy makers might take to provide those supports:

- A re-thinking of goals and standards.

Policy makers should require and help those involved in workforce development efforts to base their efforts on well-designed assessments of the needs of individual workers, employers, and their communities. These assessments can adapt the frameworks of skill standards now being developed by the National Institute for Literacy and the National Skill Standards Board, and further develop the alternative methodologies which have been developed for assessing individual and organizational learning needs.

This will help stakeholders to understand what roles education and training can play in local economic development. Good needs assessments will also help planners get away from outmoded and short-sighted views of the skills and knowledge that workers now require. It will push those involved to rethink what combinations of services workers and employers need.

- Professional development opportunities

Adult educators who want to provide relevant, high-quality work-related learning services need specialized training and guidance from experienced, qualified experts. They also need research and development to clarify how best to serve various populations and learning needs. Also required are adequate pay and benefits to enable educators to stick with this work long enough to develop expertise and connections to those they are to serve. In short, adult educators need the kinds of supports any other profession -- including educators working in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary settings -- needs.

To help provide these opportunities, national-level policy makers should:

-- *Sponsor research and development projects which focus on questions identified by the field. Where possible, involve practitioners in the research, to ensure its relevance and to foster a "practitioner inquiry" and "continuous improvement" ethic. In many cases, significant research has already been done but has not been made widely available, especially to busy practitioners who have little time to wade through thick reports. This might require special projects which summarize key lessons from existing research for dissemination in concise digests.*

-- *Ensure that research findings are disseminated efficiently via conferences,*

publications, and electronic media. One or more national clearinghouses need to be put in charge of collecting and disseminating research in this area.

-- Encourage state- and local-level policy makers to hire well-qualified personnel to staff work-related adult education efforts, and to pay them wages and benefits commensurate with their responsibilities and qualifications.

□ Connections to other players in the system

Adult educators need access to employers, unions, job-training providers, and other players in local and state workforce development systems, to clarify what learning needs various populations have, effective practices, and joint strategies for responding to those needs.

Such cooperation among stakeholders can be facilitated through public policies that "encourage collaborative efforts that guarantee public and private sector participation in a structured process for defining needs and negotiating the availability of resources. This process can be an effective tool for policy making at the national, state, local, and regional levels" (McCain and Pantazis, 1997, p. 31).

But adult educators have often not been given access to local- and state-level workforce planning boards and other forums where needs are identified and policies are made.

To help adult educators to build those connections, national-level policy makers should:

-- Sponsor research which identifies how adult educators can best collaborate with other players in workforce development systems and workplace improvement initiatives. This might entail polling those who have already attempted to use adult basic education in workforce development and organizational development efforts, and developing case studies and guidelines which identify both best practices and pitfalls to be aware of.

-- Disseminate and further develop those guidelines through program and staff development activities for interested parties.

-- Use the business, labor, and job training press to further distribute information about effective work-related adult education partnerships.

-- Require those applying for funds to demonstrate how they will create linked, integrated services. Funders should, for example, require that workforce development decision-making bodies at state and local levels allow participation by qualified adult educators. Similarly, funders of workplace basic skills programs should require active participation and investment by employers and workers in making the education program an active component of workplace improvements.

▯ Access to technology

To be effective players in workforce development, adult educators need to be able to use up-to-date technologies for both instructional and program planning purposes. This is in keeping with the current emphasis on incorporating technology into school-to-work initiatives and into community- and state-level planning for workforce development. Put another way, if school-to-work and workforce development boards are supposed to have access to technology, why shouldn't adult basic educators, as well?

Adults participating in workplace basic skills programs often do so with the hope of learning how to use the computers they see all around them in the workplace and which they see their children using at school and even in the home. Employers likewise often decide to set up workplace basic skills programs with the hope that they will help workers to be able to use new computer technologies. For these reasons, adult educators should be providing introductory computer skills training and can merge that training with instruction in writing, math, information-gathering, and other skills recommended by SCANS, Equipped for the Future, and the National Skill Standards Board.

Adult educators also need to be connected electronically to data bases being set up by local- and state-level workforce development systems, to help learners get access to jobs, skill requirements, and other service providers. For their own professional development, adult educators should have access to listservs, Web pages, and sample computerized curricula.

All of this will require investment in equipment and staff training. To provide these supports, national-level policy makers should:

-- *Sponsor pilot projects which demonstrate how adult educators can best use electronic technologies for instructional, planning, and professional development purposes to enable them to participate more effectively in local workforce and workplace development initiatives.*

-- *Disseminate information (including information now embedded in existing reports) about such uses of technologies via clearly-written publications, conferences, and other channels.*

-- *Sponsor fellowships to allow adult educators to develop expertise in these areas.*

-- *Help adult educators get access to technology via grants, low-cost loans, and other means.*

Step 4: Provide incentives, flexibility, and supports to business, labor, and other players, to encourage their involvement and investment in workforce development.

We have now laid out the components of a solid workforce development system and some of the supports which adult educators will need to participate effectively in that system.

In this cost-conscious age, the next question which might be asked is "Who will pay for all of this?"

The easy response is that the costs of this system should be shared by government and the businesses and individuals who will benefit from it. Another response is that pieces of the system are already in place and that existing budgets should be redirected to services which help to create the desired new system rather than continuing business as usual.

Shown below are arguments for who should invest what kinds of resources and how those investments can best be used:

Government can facilitate private-sector investment.

The National Governors' Association argues that government should primarily "serve as a catalyst for increasing employer investment in workers and for creating a training market place that provides learning opportunities for workers from all sizes and types of firms" (Simon, p. 1). Government must take more responsibility for worker training because so many workers are in transition and not attached to any one workplace for very long. Government can encourage investment in training via "various tax incentives, federal guaranteed student loans and grants for postsecondary education, institutional support from community colleges and four-year institutions, and a variety of work-based training and education programs, and communication and information sharing networks customized to address employee and employer needs" (Ibid, p. 3).

The NGA report argues that the public sector needs to help strengthen the competitive advantage of private sector companies because they ultimately can "contribute to a strong economy and ensure that workers can get and keep good jobs" (Simon, p. 4). Making similar arguments, the National Alliance of Business (NAB) calls for targeting public resources to creating a training system geared to employer and employee needs. Such a system would have the kinds of features described in Part IV and have the overall effect of facilitating communication, decision making, and investment by employers, workers, and service providers.

These features include One-Stop Career Centers; a labor market information system (with information on what skills are needed, who provides training for which occupations, what the training results have been, and what occupations meet clients' interests); an emphasis on accountability; training and education which meet high standards; training vouchers that are market-driven (to force providers to improve to compete); and business leadership (Jones, pp. 2-4). NAB concludes: "It is time to recognize that the system must be led by the private sector which is providing the jobs and setting the standards for skills in those jobs" (Ibid, p. 4).

Government might also offer incentives (tax breaks, tuition assistance, access to special education and training services) to employers who hire welfare recipients and then provide the training and education those new hires require to succeed in their new jobs and to move on to better ones.

Government can target public funds to special needs in the field.

In addition to serving as a facilitator of private-sector investment in work-related education and training, the federal government can supply some targeted investment of its own, particularly if new "windfall" money becomes available from, say, reduced welfare payments. The agencies involved in workforce development might contribute to a workforce "superfund" that could be used to support improvements in the following areas of the field:

- *Professional development (including cross-training)*
- *Program evaluation*
- *Learner assessment*
- *Adoption of new definitions of basic skills and appropriate skill standards*
- *Development of certification systems*
- *Use of the Department of Labor's O*NET system*
- *Use of new technologies for learning and program management*
- *Development of new approaches to integration of vocational training and basic skills education*
- *Building collaborative decision making at state and local levels*
- *Disseminating good adult education practice*
- *Services for special populations (e.g., the disabled, out-of-school youth, older workers, welfare recipients, homeless, rural populations, language minorities) and particular industries.*

Public funds should be targeted to those who have done solid needs assessments and who have a track record of commitment to improving the economic prospects of workers and their communities.

Flexible guidelines can facilitate innovation and rapid response to emerging needs.

Testifying before Congress for the National Alliance of Business , Roberts T. Jones (Jones, 1997) emphasizes the need for business involvement in planning and oversight of programs. Employers, he says, are particularly concerned about the continuing shortage of qualified workers.

He advises Congress to "resist the urge of trying to resolve all of the institutional roles and functions that generate turf fights at every level of system administration" (Ibid, p.2). Instead, Congress should . . .

> *. . . give state and local authorities the flexibility . . . to design systems that are user-friendly, responsive to rapidly changing skills in jobs, and credible to employers . . . that flexibility may or may not need to include some kind of additional waiver authority for state experimentation. If states can create more effective systems than those we can imagine today in federal legislation, they should be able to get waivers to do so.*

Jones requests federal legislation which would provide single, flexible grants which allow various programs to be integrated into a single system with the kinds of features described above (under "Government can facilitate private-sector investment.")

Workforce services should follow high-performance standards.

Paul Cole, Secretary-Treasurer of the New York State AFL-CIO and organized labor's representative on the National Skill Standards Board, argues that organized labor also supports the creation of new workforce development systems which meet the criteria of high performance work organizations. The new systems should be "customer-driven" (customers being defined as both employers and job-seekers), "demand-side led" (i.e., responsive to economic and workplace needs), providing a "value-added dimension" for the customer, continuously improving themselves to meet customer expectations and world-class standards for good practice, with "multiple access points" aided by leading-edge information technology, and "performance-driven" (i.e., measured by outcomes rather than inputs or the "process" used).

Skills standards can keep efforts focused on priority learning objectives.

Cole stresses that all partners -- including not just employers but unions as well -- need to be involved in identifying the knowledge, skills, and abilities workers will need in the emerging workplace. These skills will include academic skills, employability skills, and occupational skills. He advises aligning state efforts with those of the National Skill Standards Board (Cole, pp. 5-6). Skill standards and certification, the National Governors' Association argues, can provide employers with a "common way of communicating the skills they require" and workers with "the means of communicating the skills they have achieved." Skill standards also "serve as a common vehicle for measuring the outcomes of training programs and, in turn, assessing the performance of providers" (Simon, p. 5).

Collaborative decision-making can build ownership and commitment.

Cole cites the New York State workforce system as a model. He feels that New York's system has been developed through a patient, risk-taking, collaborative dialogue of parties with similar interests rather than by fiat of a governor's office, legislature, or other central authority. This "give and take among virtually all of the state's workforce stakeholders through a consensus decision-making process" has produced a "workforce development system that all had ownership of, and were committed to making a reality" (Cole, p. 10).

Conclusion: Recognize that leadership is needed now.

Shown above are four steps that national-level policy makers might take to help create adult basic education systems which are responsive to the needs of workers, employers, and their communities. This will require new thinking and investment of public and private resources.

Building a more effective adult learning system will also require leadership by individuals in decision-making positions within the federal government (Congress and federal agencies in particular) and within national-level institutions which represent the business community and organized labor.

While the policy-making context has in recent years not always encouraged public investment in such ambitious initiatives as "creating a new system for work-related learning," we need to remember (as researcher W. Norton Grubb points out) that Americans are good at building systems (like our judicial, transportation, communications, health, and public education systems). We thus have the inclination and capacity to be "system builders" and should be able to deal with the challenge of creating effective systems for workforce development, workplace improvement, and lifelong learning. The new federal Workforce Investment Act represents an opportunity to create these new systems, but only if leaders step forward and "seize the day."

As stated at the beginning of this section, you as policy makers now have a choice. You can allow the issue of workforce basic skills to continue to drift without direction or support. Or you can take responsibility for creating new ways to ensure that U.S. workers can develop the knowledge and skills they need to participate actively in good jobs in a strong, healthy economy.

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

Interviews and Focus Groups Conducted

Interviews conducted with . . .

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